

A doctor is sitting next to a complete stranger on a flight to Honolulu. He sees that the stranger is reading through some official looking documents. "You must be a lawyer," the doctor says to the stranger.

"Yes, I am," replies the stranger.

"So how much do you charge per hour?" asks the doctor.

"I don't charge by the hour. I charge \$500 for every three questions," answers the lawyer.

The doctor replies, "Wow! Isn't that a lot of money for just three questions?"

The lawyer answers, "Not really...so what's your third question?"

An anecdote like the one above doesn't work if you give away the punch line. An essay, however, is a bit different. Your reader doesn't want to have to guess where you're going; he or she expects a "road map" to see the route. Therefore, you need to give the reader a sneak preview of what is coming up on the road ahead. Remember the complex topic sentence we worked with when we learned about 8- and 11-sentence paragraphs? They're back, and now we'll be using them with multi-paragraph essays. A **complex topic sentence** acts as a **sneak preview** and is called the **claim** (thesis or controlling statement) of the essay. A controlling statement is a **one-sentence statement** of your essay's main points.

A clearly written claim (thesis or controlling statement) keeps you on track by reminding you of your route, your direction, and your destination. And that brings us to an important "rule of three":

**A GOOD CLAIM (THESIS OR CONTROLLING STATEMENT) INCLUDES THREE "P'S."**

**IT IS A THREE-PRONGED PARALLEL PREVIEW OF YOUR ESSAY.**

Here's an example:

Television has a positive effect because it helps people learn,  
it gives them information from all over the world, and it allows them to relax.

- The three **p**rungs are the three ways television has a positive effect. What are the three positive effects?
- The three prongs are written in a **p**arallel form, which means they have the same grammatical structure. What do the three prongs have in common?
- The claim (thesis or controlling statement) gives the reader a **p**review of what the essay will be about. What will this essay be about?

## ***Parallelism in Action***

Items are in **parallel** form when they have the **same grammatical structure**. For example, if each item in a list is an "ing" word, the items are written in parallel form. If a series of sentences each begins with the words, "There are...", the sentences are written in parallel form.

It is a good idea to put any kind of list or series in parallel form. It is especially important when writing a **claim** (thesis).

**Why parallel?** The following illustration may help you see the logic behind putting items in parallel form. Imagine you are putting together a poster that announces some upcoming MORP dance activities. Which of the two posters on the back states the information most clearly?

***MORP Dance 2013***

*Buy a dress.*

*Hiring a limousine.*

*Need to ask a guy to go  
with you.*

***MORP Dance 2013***

*Buy a dress.*

*Hire a limousine.*

*Ask a guy.*

Which one did you choose? Why?

Circle the claims (thesis or controlling statements) below that are **parallel**.

Broomfield is a great place to live because of its beautiful open spaces, its small town feel, and it has a low crime rate.

Broomfield is a great place to live because of its beautiful open spaces, its small town feel, and its low crime rate.

The most important qualities of a good friend are a sense of humor, kindness, and dependability.

The most important qualities of a good friend are a sense of humor, being kind, and someone who can be depended on.

Packing all three ideas into a single sentence can be a challenge, but using parallelism will make writing an essay easier, and it will ensure that your claim (thesis or controlling statement) is clear, logical, and concise.

***Practice with parallel form***

Read the claims (thesis or controlling statements) below. Determine which sentences are correct and which need to be revised so that they are written in parallel form. Write "Correct" next to correctly written claims. Revise the incorrect statements.

1. The act of memorizing and reciting passages of prose and poetry has multiple benefits, including improved reading skills, making presentation skills stronger, and improving one's writing.
2. Computers are helpful because they are a way to communicate, a way to get work finished faster, and a way to entertain people.
3. William Shakespeare is influential because of his poetry, his plays, and because he coined so many new words.
4. Every student should complete high school because high school graduates earn more, finding better jobs, and they have more choices.
5. Every child should have a pet because pets provide companionship, teach compassion, and encourage responsibility.